

Adam and the butcher

‘Adnān ad-Dā‘uq (1932-1986)

Translated (from Arabic)

by

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Yesterday ... just yesterday, life smiled on me as it had never before... from beneath thick layers of oblivion, that smile, buried since time immemorial, stretched across my face and a feeling of peace enveloped me.

Sometimes I would have almost forgotten who am I ... I would have almost lost myself in the multitude of questions hammering in my head mercilessly during the day and night ... the smile was lost among the thousand faces that passed; I instantly forgot what the smile looked like and where it came from.

Yesterday, the comrades met at Wahid’s house. It was the usual meeting in which, every Friday, the subjects of art, literature, philosophy, music and women were discussed ... almost everything.

Once the wheels of discussion turn on an issue ... each tries to excel the other; each tries to lay his knowledge out in the most erudite way and to show the breadth of his vision. I was the only one who kept silence; I felt that my presence, in this chatty atmosphere, became, with the passage of time, tedious and onerous; it made the meeting gloomier.

Then, suddenly, I realized my unfortunate critical situation

Their eyes were looking at me, their minds were swirling with thousands of thoughts wondering about the secret of my silence and depression.

Finally, I dared to ... I gathered my spirits, and left Wahid's house, wandering through the empty streets of the city after midnight; I was after something that I do

not know what is it... after a secret that I could not decipher ... after an overwhelming uncertainty that kept the doors of joy and freedom closed to me.

Next day I submitted my resignation.

Dear director,

Because I am one of those who believes in 'Mens sana in corpore sano' ; and because I am among those who hate living off the sweat of others and taking the bread out of their mouths. And because I am not one of those who bury people alive;

I hereby present my resignation to save myself from an eternal riddle with which I cannot go in harmony.

I am sure that you, being familiar with and experienced in eating human flesh, will find someone else who can efficiently replace me.

Sincerely yours

I handed my resignation letter over to the secretary, who laid it before the director; and I stayed at my desk, smoking and thinking, to overcome the boredom of waiting for the decision.

In quick snapshots, memories of the past flashed before my eyes:

One day he was about to burn the rice barns, I saw him; he was one of the manager's entourage... a smart, active employee ... his only concern is how to steal ... stealing is a diversion that he inherited from his remote ancestors.

Before him, his father spent his life stealing bits of everything that eventually overflowed the rooms he used as silos in his home.

This 'honest' heir inherited from his father 'doing good for others', 'love for others' and also the love of his direct boss.

Suddenly the door opened... the boss, smiling, came out holding my resignation letter in his hand.

A very old image flashed before my eyes: though Adam was full of vigor and spirit; all doors were closed to Adam. Yes, all the doors were closed to Adam; because Adam doesn't know when he should tell the truth; that was exactly Adam's problem.

Adam himself was expelled from paradise; and set out on his turbulent and long overland journey... from one office to another... from one company to another.

Adam was once appointed as a guard at a flour mill. One time he caught the proprietor of the mill takes a third of each sack of flour and store it in special silos that are sold wholesale on weekends.

Accusing him of stealing, Adam revolted against the owner, and beat him with a stick, 'you steal the subsistence of the poor.' He said to him.

'Oh, stupid... you will never grow up.' The owner replied Adam with an astute smile; and plucked the stick from Adam's grasp kicking him out:

'Away from me,' said the owner, 'and remember there will come a day when you won't be able to get even a loaf of bread.'

Adam went out in search of livelihood ...

Later he got a job as a night watchman at merchants' bazaar. He stays up all night and sleeps all day. At the end of month, when he went to collect his salary, he was given a letter that reads as follows:

"Your services are no longer needed."

"We appointed you as a security guard; you have to sleep at night and stay awake all day. But you worked against the nature of things; thieves can only steal during night... while your eyes never get tired of watching. You, like predator, swooped down on their heads rather you were an inevitable fate. The thieves got mad and went on strike ... the strike devastated the town that was afflicted by vices and diseases; indeed, life became unbearable. Then, at

the request of the thieves on strike, we came to the conclusions that, in the interest of the town, you should be fired.”

Adam continued his journey to earn a living. He stopped at a butcher shop. People are crowded shoulder to shoulder. They all wanted meat; and they were waiting for salvation. The butcher is a giant monster standing behind the dangling slices of meat. People can only buy bones; meat is for dogs. When people leave, it’s the dogs’ turn; they line up nicely in a long, neat queue ... when a dog receives a tender red slice, he gives the butcher a thank you gesture and leaves.

Adam seeks to earn a living.

Adam had not eaten in days; he had been on an empty stomach. He had been trying to eke out a living; to eat something, even a dry morsel of food.

He stops by a butcher shop asking for a job at a token wage.

‘What is your name...?’ The butcher asked.

‘Adam’, he said with broken spirit.

‘What do you know about Don Quixote...?’ added the butcher.

‘He was an honest butcher.’ Adam replied.

‘What about the seven pillars of wisdom...?’ The butcher continued questioning Adam.

‘Water, air, food, clothing, maintaining family dignity, risk free life, and to be on good terms with people.’ Said Adam.

‘Unfortunately, I can’t offer you a job,’ the butcher replied sadly. ‘All my clients are dogs who hate rudeness; therefore, whoever works with me must be of refined intellectual capacity, and treat dogs with dignity and gallantry because if they are mistreated, my work permit will be withdrawn.’

The director is standing by the door of his office looking at me with a smile. He prolongs his stop. He jerked his hand, in which he was holding my resignation letter, towards me. Finally, he nods his head whispering:

‘Please come into my office.’

I get up dragging my feet and carrying on my back all the heavy burdens of Adam throughout the centuries; I made my way to his office.

‘Take a seat.’ The director pointed to a comfy chair.

I sat in the chair, pondering how to loosen the grip of laws of nature that shackle humans; I was given a courteous treatment ... he offered me an expensive brand of cigarette; he smiled and sat next to me and tenderly said:

‘Are you really decisive with resignation?’

‘Quite decisive rather for deliverance from...’ indifferently, I replied.

‘But you are of limited intellectual capacities... you hardly knew who Don Quixote is, nor did you know to enumerate the seven pillars of wisdom.’ He argued.

‘I want to shake off an eternal burden torturing me’, I replied.

‘That is not easy; you would pay a heavy price for it, your life.’ He gave me a mischievous laugh.

‘I’d rather take my own life on my terms than die a little each day.’ My lips curved into a mocking smile.

‘Are you aware of the consequences...?’ he got up angrily and put out his cigarette in a large ashtray.

Sunk in my seat, I confidently replied:

‘Pretty sure... no question.’

He exploded in rage screaming; his screams were so loud that they could be heard outside when I left and closed the door.

In life, you can easily come across people who are robotically orientated, without feelings ... People who run after dwarves...

People lying next to each other on the ground; and the creepy-crawlies bump into them and swagger past. However, everything is fine, things are going well: production is increasing, the conveyor belt of the machine running non-stop day and night, and export is greater than ever.

I stood in front of the butcher... and saw people and dogs waiting together side by side in order and discipline.

Once the butcher noticed me, he, with his large cleaver in hand, rushed over to me; and in a comely face, hailed me:

'Sir, only for you, meat is sold... fresh, tender meat is only for you.'

'Do you know who don Quixote is...' Smiling, I asked him.

'Of course, Sir, I know him.' He submissively stuttered.

To humiliate him further, I asked:

'Tell me then who is he?'

'It's me, Sir.' He said.

I chuckled so hard that it made him uncomfortable and the sharp cleaver trembled in his hand.

'What about the seven pillars of wisdom?' I asked dryly again.

'Meat... meat... meat... meat ... meat... meat... meat...' He replied.

'Who is the best of your clients?' I asked sarcastically.

'You, my Sir... you who pays more... you who in his hand my license resides; you who can turn my flesh into bones and my bones into flesh.' He keenly said.

'Who am I then, oh butcher?' I asked.

'You are Man ... creator of miracles on earth; you are the one who transformed the history of the universe...'

Adam was dismissed from this world.

The butcher starts to sell meat the way he likes and to whom he likes.

Don Quixote was again fighting the myths and hitting all the castles with his wooden sword.

Peace returned again... their psychological enigma had been resolved, the thieves sent the following letter to whom it may concern:

Oh! Our Lord

Words fail us to express our gratitude and allegiance to you. You have done marvelous things for us. Thanks to your knowledge and wisdom, justice finally arrived and rights returned to the true owners, to us.

Having issued your ordinance that guards sleep at night and wake up during the day, our men were actively at work and were able to rob over a thousand merchants stores.... so, in recognition of your exceptional contribution to our cause, the thieves' union decided to grant you half of the stolen.

Your part will be delivered tomorrow.

Sincerely yours

The syndicate of thieves.

I came back to my workplace; I found my boss waiting for me outside his office. Once he saw me, his face shone with joy. He run up to me and said:

‘Sir, please come in.’

‘What’s going on, I said to myself,’ ‘I would like to know the secret of this ‘drastic change’ on earth.’

I entered and went over to the comfy seat; but he said:

‘No, please, Sir, come here... here; he was pointing at his desk.’

‘But this is yours.’ I said.

‘Sir, the board of directors appointed you as the general manager of our establishment; as from today I will be your assistant.’ He bowed.

During my only one day as a chief executive officer, I issued the following decree:

To all

All the people will be flayed and their skins burned outside the town; this order shall take effect immediately.

By doing so, we ensure that people steer clear of the laws of complicated contemporary nature; and they will live in harmony.

Signed

General Manager

Alarmed by my decree, the board of directors held an extraordinary session to discuss it. As my action was declared illegal, the board decided to release me immediately of my duties, and without compensation. And, according to the laws and regulations in force, I was held liable for the damages caused to the establishment. Furthermore, my movable and immovable thoughts were confiscated.

The story was originally published in the Baghdad-based *AlAqlam*, 1970, Volume 11-12, pp. 34-36.